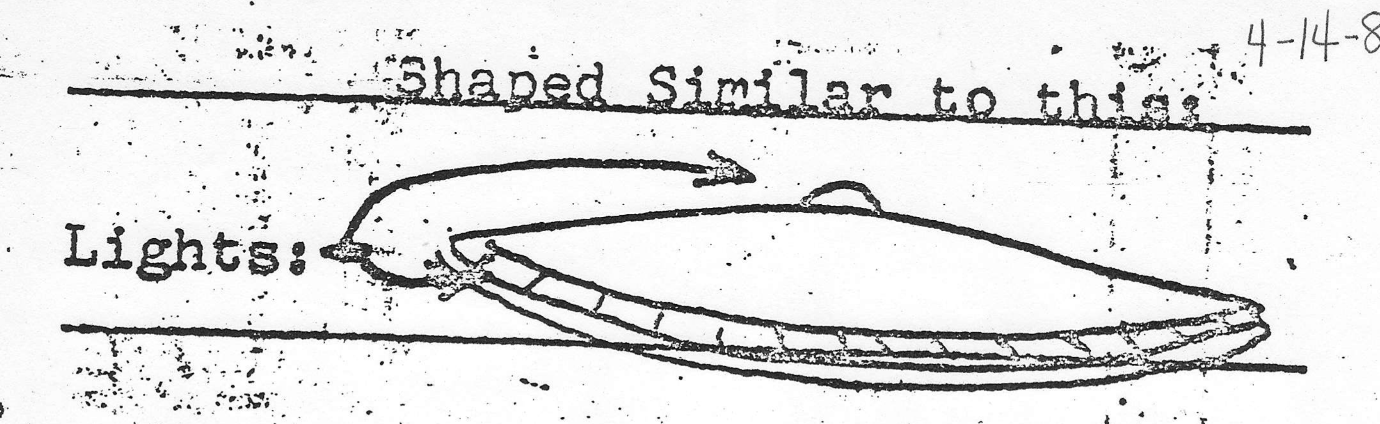
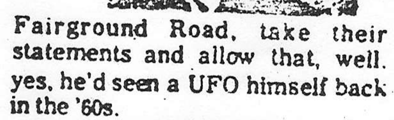
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There WAS something out there

Steve Varnum



The difference is one between knowing what you're seeing and knowing what it is you've seen, which is why red-haired Mrs. Louis Ferraro could make perfect sense standing in her kitchen in Sturbridge last Thursday afternoon saying, "It was something. I don't know what it was, but it was something."

Something has had the Ferraro household buzzing for the better part of a week now. Police have come up to ask questions and sketch sketches. Reporters have knocked pane-lessly on their screen door. Uncles and friends have called and made funny Star Trekkian noises over the telephone.

Whatever-it-was flew over their house last Tuesday night while mom was in one room watching Masada, pop was in another watching Gator, and the family dog was fast asleep. If 15-year-old Penny and her friend Michelle Perreault weren't playing rummy at the kitchen counter, and if brother Louis hadn't taken out the garbage earlier in the evening and left the front curtain in front of the sliding glass doors opened, it might have snuck right past unnoticed.

Granted, huge oval-shaped flying objects that move faster than a speeding bullet with a glow that could light a baseball stadium shouldn't be easy to miss. On the other hand, there are a lot of people — rock-collectors, typists, and the like — who spend a lot of time looking earthward these days.

The Ferraros don't know yet what it was that buzzed them, but they think they know what it wasn't. It wasn't a helicopter, unless someone has invented a model that glows amber and orange and flys propeller-less.

It wasn't one of the jets that frequently roar over the area on their way to Westover Air Force Base. It had no wings, tail, or flashing lights. Besides, those jets never fail to scramble both the family dog's brain and the television reception at the Ferraros, and both were as unjangled and serene as the spring Cedar Lake waters Tuesday night.

This something was round, Michelle and Penny agree. It was big and round and ringed with lights and had an extremely bright white dome. It moved quickly and silently, passing over the house from behind the tallest pine tree on the other side of the lake in seconds. By the time the girls shrieked to pappa Louis and made it out the sliding glass door to the porch, it was overhead and climbing rapidly.

People who report UFO sightings come in two varieties, or 55 fewer than the Heinz soup cans some of these crafts are supposed to resemble. The first is travelers of lonely wooded roads. The second is young girls, whose flights of fancy are prone to being nearly as far-flung as the sights they claim to see.

So when Sturbridge police received the phone call, "Is this where you call to report a UFO?" Michelle deadpanned, they didn't respond at first. Only after Penny called back to see if anyone else had reported a sighting did officer Stanley Parzych drive out to Fairground Road, take their statements and allow that, well, yes, he'd seen a UFO himself back in the '60s.

Penny Ferraro, a pretty, petite brunette, says that reaction was much more sympathetic than most of the ones she got at school the day after the story hit the newspapers. "What were you on that night?" "What was in that milk you were drinking?" "Been seeing little green men?" were more typical.

Except for the lad who listened to the story wide-eyed. An obvious believer. "Why didn't you shoot it so it would stop?" he asked.

"It was kind of exciting, because it just kept going. If it stopped, I would have died," Penny said.

"Afterwards, we were looking for it. We saw a huge star, but when we went out later, it was gone," Michelle, the quiet one whose braces produced a shining smile, added.

The Ferraros are still trying to figure out what their something was. Michelle, who believed in flying saucers to begin with, and Penny, who didn't are convinced. Mr. Ferraro, who didn't see it until it was seconds — and miles — away, isn't sure. Mrs. Ferraro is still skeptical. And son Louis says, "You still tellin' those flying saucer stories?"

"And, think," Mrs. Ferraro was saying, "If my son hadn't opened the curtain to put the garbage out..."

Steve Varnum is managing editor of The News.

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